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MEASURES TO ELIMINATE INTERNATIONAL
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Letter dated 19 April 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I refer to the letters addressed to you from the Permanent Representatives of Syria (A/53/876-S/1999/326) and Lebanon (A/53/878-S/1999/333), both dated 24 March 1999. Given the overt similarities in style and content, which are not surprising, it might prove more than convenient to address both letters with a single response.

First, I wish to recall the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism of 1994 (General Assembly resolution 49/60, annex), whereby the international community reaffirmed that provoking terror is "in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations". I would also recall the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV), annex), which provides that sovereignty carries a responsibility not to allow terrorist acts to be organized or prepared in one's territory. In sum, supporting terror - under any pretext - is both morally repugnant and a violation of international norms.

The Syrian and Lebanese letters, like the policies of Syria and Lebanon on the ground, stand in direct contradiction to all of the aforementioned principles. By disguising terrorists in the false cloak of national resistance, these statements engage in an insidious form of complicity to terrorism.

In particular, the Lebanese Representative claims that Hizballah's "resistance" targets only the Israeli forces that operate in Lebanon. This is

* A/54/50.

plainly false. Hizballah has targeted and murdered hundreds of innocent civilians throughout the world. Moreover, Hizballah's record of seizing hostages from many countries is a well established fact, known throughout the international community. As recently as December 1998, Hizballah launched a massive rocket attack against civilian towns and villages in northern Israel, destroying hundreds of buildings, injuring civilians, and forcing thousands into underground bomb shelters to escape the deadly barrage. The attempt by Lebanon and Syria to redefine this terrorism as "resistance" is an insult to the hundreds of victims of Hizballah's gruesome tactics over the years.

It should, moreover, be noted that Hizballah's own statements belie the picture that the Lebanese and Syrian Representatives are attempting to portray to United Nations Member States. Hizballah's leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, announced recently that "Palestine is occupied territory and the Israeli presence there is an occupation entity and illegal. There is no end to the struggle with such a regime" (Joumhouri Islami, Iran, 6 March 1999). In other words, the "resistance" of Hizballah is not a "struggle for national liberation", as the Lebanese Representative would have Member States believe, but a campaign against the very existence of the State of Israel.

The blatant support of Syria and Lebanon for the terrorism of Hizballah is further confirmed by the language of these two letters, such as the suggestion in the Syrian letter that Hizballah's terrorism is a "legitimate struggle" and the Lebanese statement identifying Lebanon directly with Hizballah, renaming the group "the Lebanese National Resistance". Indeed, far from restraining Hizballah as it is obliged to do under international law, Lebanon has openly adopted the terrorist group as its own.

Israel has repeatedly expressed its willingness to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978) in its entirety. In that resolution, the Council calls for not only the withdrawal of Israeli forces but also the restoration of international peace and security and the return of the effective authority of the Lebanese Government in that area. The declared willingness of the Syrian and Lebanese Governments to host an elaborate terrorist infrastructure, permit its regular reinforcement and endorse its operations directed against a neighbouring country is totally incompatible with the last two provisions of the resolution.

Lebanon refuses to negotiate with Israel on implementing resolution 425 despite Israel's continuing invitations to do so. Lebanon's Prime Minister reiterated this point on 14 March in a radio interview: "We are not at all ready to discuss with Israel any security arrangements or granting any guarantees" (Sawt al-Arab Radio, 14 March 1999). Therefore, Israel is left with no choice but to exercise its right to self-defence in accordance with international law.

It is particularly sad that the possibility of peace and security along the Israel-Lebanon border is being sabotaged by a third country, namely Syria, which in effect is holding the implementation of Council resolution 425 hostage to its own bid for territorial gains with Israel. The confluence of these two letters underscores the nature of this forced linkage.

Nevertheless, Israel once again calls on the Government of Lebanon to return to the negotiating table on implementing Council resolution 425. Israel also calls on the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Syria to resume negotiations with Israel in order to resolve all outstanding issues in the appropriate bilateral frameworks.

I should be grateful if you will have this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 161 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ambassador Dore GOLD
Permanent Representative